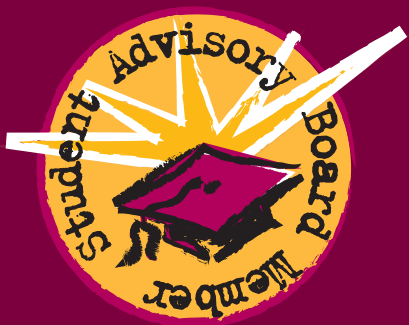


# State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board **Fall 2014**

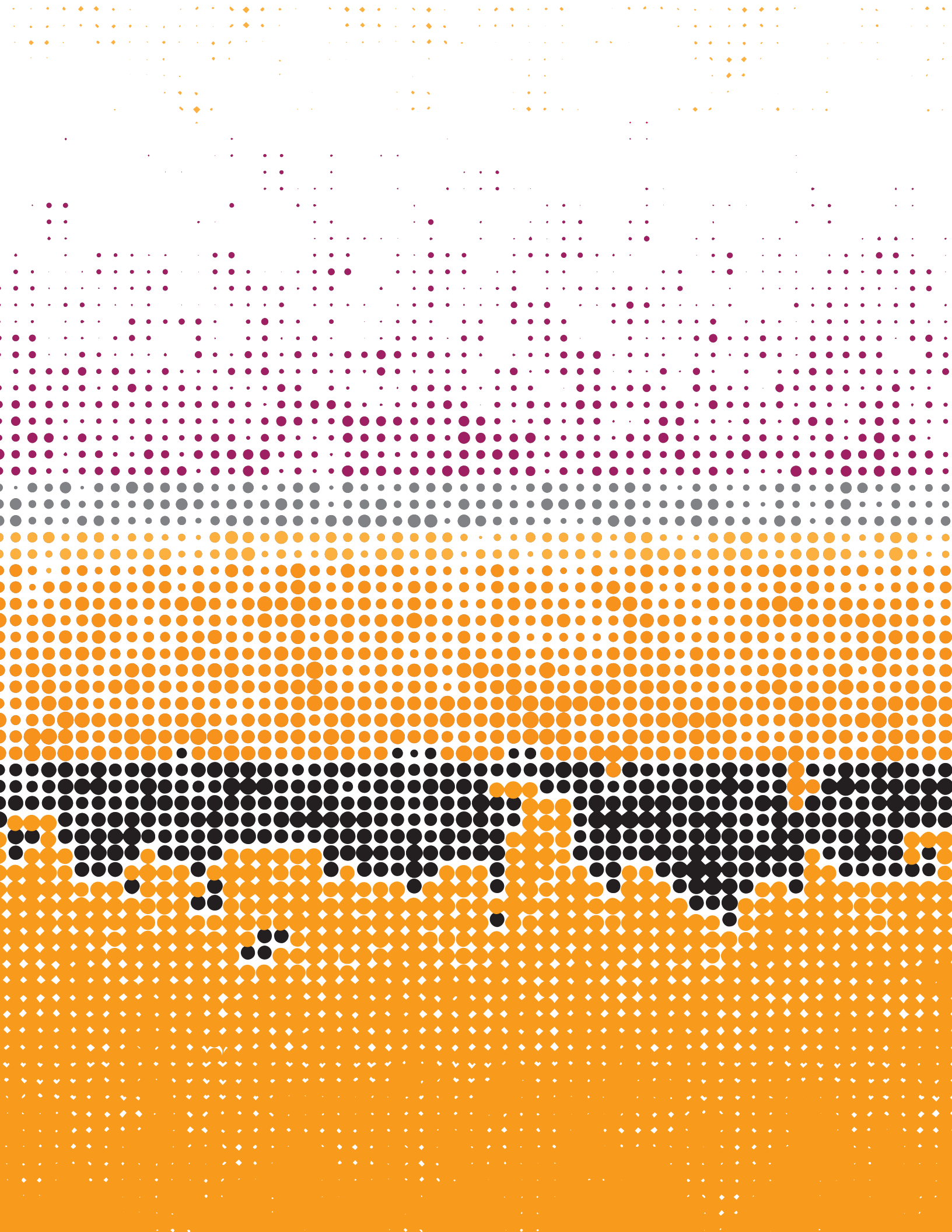


**2014 2015**

Superintendent Denise Juneau

The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana,  
an initiative to increase the number of Montana students  
who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with youth, schools,  
community organizations, and businesses.







*"I formed the Student Advisory Board because I wanted to hear from students. The students on the board provide me with great insight and honest feedback. If we are going to be successful at increasing the graduation rate and preparing students for the next steps in their lives, we must bring students to the table."*

*State Superintendent Denise Juneau*

## Student Advisory Board Fall Summit 2014

### Overview

Superintendent Denise Juneau's 2014 - 2015 Student Advisory Board (SAB) assembled for the Fall Summit on October 9 & 10, 2014, at Helena College. The theme of the Summit was Graduation Matters Montana, and SAB members discussed with Superintendent Juneau ways that we can continue to grow the success of the Graduation Matters Montana initiative. As Superintendent Juneau stated, "The more I hear from students, the more effective I can be on improving our public education system. I want all students to have the opportunity to graduate and obtain the skills they need for their college and career dreams."



The SAB is comprised of 35 high school students from 30 Montana schools. Members were nominated by local school staff and community members and completed an application process for selection to the board. Board members in grades 9-12 travelled from rural communities such as Froid and Hardin and from larger communities such as Kalispell and Great Falls. The SAB reflects the diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences of Montana students. Overall, the board consists of musicians, athletes, actors, activists, ranchers, and gamers, at risk and honor roll students, and students who dropped out and re-enrolled in high school.

### Graduation Matters Montana (GMM) Theme

SAB members discussed what the GMM initiative is and how it has been implemented over the past four years. They reviewed the relevance of the issues of dropping out and graduating and how we can meet the goal of decreasing the dropout rate to 2.5% by 2016.

### Real Colors™ Activity

Real Colors™ is a dynamic workshop experience that provides participants with the skills to understand a person's behavior, motivation, and temperament, and to improve communication with others. Four different colors (blue, green, gold and orange) reflect a person's personality type when they have completed the survey tool. The board utilized this tool as a team building activity. In the activity, the members divided up into their color groups and created posters that explained their color. The different groups then presented about their color and answered questions from the audience. The activity was conducted by Tara Mastel, an Extension Agent from the Montana State University Extension office in Jefferson County.

## Discussion with Superintendent Denise Juneau:

At each SAB Summit, the Superintendent asks the board members to respond to a set of critical questions based on the theme of that Summit. This Summit's critical questions were:

- 1) **We know that students who miss three or more days of school per month often fall behind in class and don't graduate on time. What can be done to help students attend school? What has your school done to encourage students to attend school?**

### SAB Reflection:

- Board members believe that providing incentives for perfect attendance is not effective. They believe that students should be held accountable for missing school but only rewarding students for perfect attendance is an unrealistic expectation. Students get sick, work, and will skip school to complete homework.
- Creating a welcoming and inclusive community at school is one way to increase the attendance rate. Board members saw attendance increase during "Spirit Weeks" and suggested that positive community events happen throughout the year to encourage students to attend school.
- Incentives that reward students after a month or longer are not effective. These incentives are not relevant because of the time frame. Schools should immediately reward students for the days they come to school with positive reinforcement and incentives.
- The SAB agreed that offering free breakfast and lunch to all students could increase attendance and decrease behavior problems. A board member whose school district qualified for universal free school meals experienced this firsthand. She described that students who were fed and didn't have to worry about access to food were better able to focus on tasks and be successful at school.
- Peer education and mentor programs create a positive school community. SAB members advised that implementing those programs will help more students get involved and develop the social networks they need to enjoy and attend school.

- 2) **How can parents, schools, and your local community encourage and support students to graduate from high school?**

- Parents are a huge component of whether students are or are not successful in school. Board members believe that parents should play a larger role at school. They want all parents to understand the value in their children's education. SAB members believe if parents were included more, they would help reinforce the value of graduating from high school.
- Stay positive and pay attention. The schools, parents, and communities need to stay positive and connected with all students. A valuable relationship with a student can be the one thing that helps a student stay in school. Increasing school counseling services could be one way to help more students work through their challenges and graduate.



- Set high expectations for all students and teachers. The community should believe in the value of educating their students and expect everyone to be passionate about educating today's youth. This includes helping teachers with professional development to keep them engaged and highly skilled.
- Supporting a mill levy is about more than money. Several of the board members have watched levies fail and worry that the community does not support students or value the importance of education.

## Graduation Matters Legislative Session Agenda Review. SAB members discussed Superintendent Juneau's Graduation Matters legislative proposals.

### Provide Funding to Educate 19-year-olds

It can take more than four years to earn a high school diploma, yet Montana schools do not receive any state funding to educate 19-year-olds. Currently, Montana is the only state in the nation that cuts off school funding when a student turns 19. Superintendent Juneau wants to support schools who educate 19-year-olds. The board members were asked, "Do you agree or disagree with providing educational services to 19-year-olds, why or why not?"

### SAB Reflection:

A majority of SAB members believed that allowing 19-year-olds to continue to receive educational services was important. They discussed how "life happens" and that many times students face problems that may force them out or to fall behind in school. Those forces could be illness, employment, or family responsibilities. They thought this was a reactive plan and focus should be maintained on preventing students from leaving school. Board members agreed that students who have fallen behind or leave school deserve a second chance to complete their education and hoped that those students would be committed to graduating.

Additional thoughts that the SAB addressed:

- Schools should be about quality instruction and not the quantity of time at school.
- There should be accommodations for various learning types and an increase of hands-on learning opportunities.
- We need to believe in students and see the best in them.
- We need to empower students to advocate for themselves.

## Raise the Legal Dropout Age to age “18 or upon Graduation”

Montana is one of only 17 states in the country that allow 16-year-olds to drop out of high school. Montana’s legal dropout age of 16 was established back in 1921 – a time of very different social and economic demands. In today’s global economy, a student needs at minimum a high school diploma to find a decent-paying job. Superintendent Juneau wants to raise the legal dropout age to “18 or upon graduation.” The board members were asked, “Do you agree or disagree with raising the age to 18, why or why not?”

### SAB Reflection:

Board members strongly believed that adults should set a strong expectation that all of Montana’s students stay in school until the age of 18 or upon graduation. They did agree that students need options because students can face difficult circumstances that impact their schooling. These life situations will often take students out of school, and schools should work on providing flexibility and alternative paths so students can graduate. They believe that a supportive community could be an answer to a lot of students’ problems. If community members and organizations would help support families who are struggling, more students would stay in school. Additional thoughts that the SAB addressed:

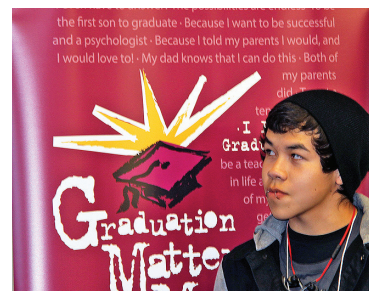
- Career centers are helpful and provide relevant skills for life after high school.
- Students need to know more about the credit recovery options available to them.
- Schools should recognize and understand that students are individuals and don’t all have the same goals.

### “I pledge” Event Activity

At the Summit, the SAB members had the opportunity to propose exciting new approaches to “I pledge to graduate” events. “I pledge” cards are used as a tool to empower students to stay committed to graduating. When a student signs a card, they are declaring they will graduate and the witness who watched them make that declaration will hold them accountable to graduate. The Office of Public Instruction has provided schools with thousands of “I pledge” cards to be used at Graduation Matters rallies and events. Board members split into small groups and developed an idea on how to improve the “I pledge” event implementation. They designed posters, billboards, and utilized social media to make the “pledge to graduate” more of a long-term campaign that can be incorporated into the community. More than half of the SAB use Twitter. Hashtag suggestions for the GMM initiative included #icompletedthepledge and #conGRADS.

The small groups presented their ideas to Superintendent Juneau and her staff. Board members were evaluated on how well they organized, envisioned, and presented their ideas. Overall, the SAB members had a great time, and Superintendent Juneau was impressed with the students’ confidence, excitement and ideas.





## SAB Final Recommendations

- Students want people across Montana to set an expectation that all students will graduate from high school.
- Students want positive reinforcement that encourages them to be successful.
- Students want the community to interact with schools and students. This type of encouragement will help students understand that their community values their education.
- Students want to build relationships with adults, and these positive relationships will help them graduate and succeed in life after high school.
- Students want an inclusive and positive high school community that focuses on peer programs and continues to provide teachers with quality professional development so they can teach students the skills they need to be successful after graduation.

*"I am a voice for people who can't be heard. I can speak and it makes a difference"*  
 Tristen

## State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members 2013-2014

Alyssa Whitworth – Polson HS  
Amanda Nelson – Skyview HS  
Andrew Donlan – Granite HS  
Ashley Hofland – Havre HS  
Baylee Everett – Hellgate HS  
Blazz Wood – Thompson Falls HS  
Caleb Dexter – Hardin HS  
Caroline Janssen – Bozeman HS  
Charlene Allmer – Wolf Point HS  
Emma Gantt – Hamilton HS  
Gabriella Blatt – Box Elder HS  
Isis Covington – Park County HS  
Jana Gemmill – Billings West HS  
Jay Van Alstyne – Helena HS  
Jerome Finley – Two Eagle River HS  
Jewel Johnson – Fergus County HS  
Jonathan Sherrod – Lincoln HS  
Jordan Smith – Froid HS  
Joseph Martinez – Belgrade HS  
Kaitlyn Presnell – Columbia Falls HS  
Karlee Simonson – CMR HS  
Naumie DuShane – Hardin HS  
Nicolas Wahl – Skyview HS  
Noah Hill – Glacier HS  
Rafael Vega – Big Sky HS  
Roland Cobell – Paris Gibson Education Center  
Samantha Eby – White Sulphur Springs HS  
Shelbi Fitzpatrick – Cut Bank HS  
Shiloh Robison – Hysham HS  
Taylor Canright – Helena HS  
Teche Ereaux – Harlem  
Timmy Regan – Custer County HS  
Trevor Canty – Billings West HS  
Tristen Belgarde – Rocky Boy HS



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